

May is... *American Wetlands Month*

What are wetlands and why are they important?

Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or ground water often enough and long enough to support vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands provide numerous benefits that include rich habitat for flora and fauna, improved water quality, flood abatement, water storage and ground water recharge, support of fisheries, and opportunities for education and recreation.

Given these benefits, many communities are exploring how to best protect their existing wetland resources and restore the thousands of acres that have been lost or impaired. Active citizens are working to protect this critical feature of the environment for future generations.

Introduction

May is a time to recognize and celebrate the wonderful ways wetlands enrich the environment, fish and wildlife, and people. It is a time to give back to the environment by learning more about wetlands and participating in the many events planned for American Wetlands Month. The Environmental Protection Agency is proud to partner with the Izaak Walton League of America and our other partners in federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and private and nonprofit organizations, to join thousands of other Americans celebrating American Wetlands Month each May. Events are scheduled across the country to better educate, involve, and engage Americans on one of Earth's most important ecosystems.



Why Celebrate Wetlands?

Wetlands are celebrated every year in May because they are among the most valuable but least understood of all natural resources. They are the link between land and water and provide rich habitat for many plants, fish, and wildlife. They are the place that many animals and birds build nests and raise their young. Migrating birds stop over in wetlands to rest and to feed on the abundant plant life that flourishes in them.

In addition, wetlands absorb and store flood waters and improve water quality. In times of drought, wetlands slowly release water at a rate that

can be absorbed to irrigate crops, raise the water table, and fill streams and ponds. When water leaves a wetland, it is cleaner and needs less chemical treatment to be suitable for human use. Water that passes through a wetland is cleaner, cheaper, and more natural.

Unfortunately, wetlands have been misunderstood for many years, viewed as wastelands to be drained and converted to other uses. If wetlands disappear, water will not be as clean, fish and bird populations will be affected, and the severity of floods will increase. Americans have begun to recognize the value of wetlands and the rate of loss has declined dramatically over the last 30 years. It is important that we stop the loss of wetlands and begin to achieve an annual net gain through restoration. Learn how you can help by learning more about wetlands and participating in the many events during American Wetlands Month this May.



Canoers dip into wetlands during an exciting educational excursion.



American Wetlands Month Steering Committee Members:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
 U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Federal Highway Administration
 USDA Forest Service
 Izaak Walton League of America
 Philip Morris Companies, Inc.

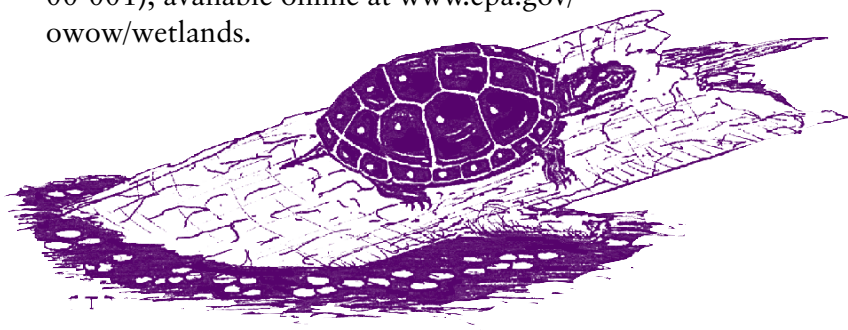
Wetlands Division

The U.S. EPA Wetlands Division, as part of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, restores and maintains the nation's waters, including wetlands, by effectively implementing EPA's responsibilities under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Additionally, the Wetlands Division works to incorporate wetlands protection and restoration into watershed planning efforts undertaken by states, tribes, and local entities. The Wetlands Division serves:

- as a catalyst for cultivating community interest in developing wetland and aquatic ecosystem protection strategies on a watershed basis;
- as a promoter and developer of tools for assessing wetland health and extent;
- as a developer and distributor of sound scientific information for wetland and watershed decision-making;
- as a supporter and proponent of effective state, tribal, and local wetland protection and restoration programs; and
- as a regulator, developing fair, flexible, and effective wetlands standards and policies.

Wetland Protection and You

American Wetlands Month activities show the importance of wetlands. They also remind us that government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect and restore wetlands. Citizens must also become involved in the effort. Volunteers who care and devote their time can make a big difference. For ways you can help, see the *Volunteer Wetland Monitoring: An Introduction and Resource Guide* (EPA 843-B-00-001), available online at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands.



History of American Wetlands Month

American Wetlands Month was inaugurated in 1991 by the U.S. EPA and our partners in federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and private and nonprofit organizations as a way to educate Americans about the worth of wetlands as a natural resource. Annual events, including national and regional conferences, have been staged. A broad range of people with ties to wetlands, including wetland scientists, educators, and public interest groups participate in these celebrations.

The National Wetlands Awards are a highlight of each year's celebration. They honor individuals from across the country who demonstrate extraordinary effort, innovation, and excellence in wetland conservation. The *American Wetlands Conference* is now held biennially in partnership with the Izaak Walton League of America. Conference information, American Wetlands Month project ideas, and a calendar of wetland events in your state can be found on the Izaak Walton League website at www.iwla.org/sos/awm.

Throughout the years the annual celebration of American Wetlands Month has continued to build toward its initial goal of empowering people to remember and celebrate wetlands in May and all year long. For more information on what you can do to take part, log onto the U.S. EPA website below.

For more information on American Wetlands Month, log onto www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/awm